

Manifesto for a human economy

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The object, methods and principles of a human economy approach

Ronald Coase won a Nobel prize in economics for inventing the idea of transaction costs in his famous paper "The nature of the firm" (1937). He recently announced his desire, with Ning Wang, to found a new journal called "Man and the economy". Coase's manifesto, "Saving economics from the economists", was published in the *Harvard Business Review* (Coase 2012). He argues there that

The degree to which economics is isolated from the ordinary business of life is extraordinary and unfortunate...In the 20th century economists could afford to write exclusively for one another. At the same time, the field experienced a paradigm shift, gradually identifying itself as a theoretical approach of economization and giving up the real-world economy as its subject matter. This separation of economics from the working economy has severely damaged both the business community and the academic discipline.

(...) Economics thus becomes a convenient instrument the state uses to manage the economy, rather than a tool the public turns to for enlightenment about how the economy operates. But because it is no longer firmly grounded in systematic empirical investigation of the working of the economy, it is hardly up to the task...The reduction of economics to price theory is troubling enough. It is suicidal for the field to slide into a hard science of choice, ignoring the influences of society, history, culture, and politics on the working of the economy. It is time to reengage the severely impoverished field of economics with the economy. Market economies springing up in China, India, Africa, and elsewhere herald unprecedented opportunities for economists to study how the market economy gains its resilience in societies with cultural, institutional, and organizational diversities (*sic*). But knowledge will come only if economics can be reoriented to the study of man as he is and the economic system as it actually exists.

This plea echoes a movement of economics students a decade ago, calling itself "post-autistic economics", which later took the form of the *real-world economics review*. In addition, the legions of heterodox economists multiply and an interdisciplinary World Economics Association, formed in 2011, soon acquired over 10,000 members. So there is plenty of resistance within the profession to an economics whose dominant model is one of rational choice in "free" markets. From Coase's

summary and these other developments several priorities stand out: to reconnect the study of the economy to the real world; to make its findings more accessible to the public; and to place economic analysis within a framework that embraces humanity as a whole, the world we live in. The “human economy” approach shares all these priorities.

Over a century ago Alfred Marshall, in his synthesis of the marginalist revolution, *Principles of Economics* (1890), defined economics as “both a study of wealth and a branch of the study of man”. Marshall, Keynes' teacher at Cambridge, was a cooperative socialist who also developed a Hegelian theory of the welfare state and was later celebrated by Talcott Parsons (1937), with Durkheim, Weber and Pareto, as an author of the new theory of social action which replaced the utilitarian evolutionism of Herbert Spencer.

My focus draws inspiration from and seeks to contribute to the tradition of economic thought, but, more explicitly than the currents within economics described above, we are open to other traditions in the humanities and social sciences, notably anthropology, history and development studies. The Human Economy research programme at the University of Pretoria has been shaped more directly by another movement of the last decade which now goes by the name of “alter-globalization” (Pleyers 2010). It is the third phase of an international project that originated in the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre soon after the millennium. The first phase (2002-2009) was a series of volumes in several languages, produced by a network of researchers and activists in Latin America and France, which aimed to introduce a wide audience to the core themes that might organize alternative approaches to the economy. These books, called *Dictionary of the Other Economy*, brought together short essays on the history of debate concerning particular topics and offered some practical applications of concepts relevant to building economic democracy. Taken together they pointed to a new language for addressing common problems of development.

A second phase saw publication of the first English collection in this series, *The Human Economy: A Citizen's Guide* (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010), for which a number of additional authors were commissioned from Britain, North America and Scandinavia. The new title reflected a double shift: from the expectation of a radical break with existing practice and an emphasis on the global context of humanity as a whole. We preferred to build on what people are doing already, even if this is obscured, marginalized or repressed by mainstream institutions. Fifteen countries were represented, but there were still no authors from Asia and Africa, where most of the people live. Extension of the international project to the Anglophone West still left a lot to do. It was also clear that the focus on interaction between researchers and activists left questions of research methodology relatively unexplored.

The University of Pretoria programme is a new departure in several senses. First, by adding a Southern African node to the burgeoning network of scholars and activists mobilised in publications so far, we seek to give greater weight to African and Asian voices and to broaden the geographical range of South-South and North-South dialogue. Second, this is the first coordinated academic research programme in the process initiated by the World Social Forum. Earlier volumes were aimed at a general audience of activists, whereas our priority is to contribute dedicated academic research to the movement for greater economic democracy. Third, starting from a core of social anthropologists, the programme has extended its reach to include sociology, history, political science, economics, geography, education and agriculture.

The Human Economy programme started out with only loose guidelines. Our aim is to build a conversation, among ourselves and with other specialists, ultimately with the general public. This conversation is as much based on empirical investigation and comparison as it is on developing a theoretical and methodological framework for planning research. Our first basic method is inspired by the ethnographic revolution that launched social and cultural anthropology in the twentieth century. This was the first sustained effort by a class of academics to break out of the ivory tower and to join the people where they live in order to discover what they do, think and want. Second, the economy is always plural and people's experience of it across time and space has more in common than the use of contrastive terms like "capitalism" or "socialism" would suggest. This approach addresses the variety of particular institutions through which most people experience economic life. Third, our aim is to promote economic democracy by helping people to organize and improve their own lives. Our findings must therefore ultimately be presented to the public in a spirit of pragmatism and made understandable for readers' own practical use.

All of this is compatible with a humanist view of the human economy. It must be so, if the economy is to be returned from remote experts to the people who are most affected by it. But humanism by itself is not enough. The human economy must also be informed by an economic vision capable of bridging the gap between everyday life (what people know) and humanity's common predicament, which is inevitably impersonal and lies beyond the actor's point of view (what they don't know). For this purpose a variety of methods have to be drawn from philosophy, world history, literature and grand social theory. Globalization is irreversible and we have to extend our normal reach to address its contradictions.

Emergent world society *is* the new human universal – not an idea, but the fact of our shared occupation of the planet crying out for new principles of association (Hart 2010). We urgently need to make a world where all people can live together. Small may be beautiful and a preference for initiatives grounded in local social realities is unchallengeable, but large-scale bureaucracies,

whether governments or business corporations, are also essential if our aspirations for economic democracy are to embrace the movement of the world we live in.

What after all is the “great transformation” of human history that we are living through? Around 1800 the world’s population was about one billion. At that time less than 3 in 100 people lived in cities. The rest lived mainly by extracting a livelihood from the land. Animals and plants were responsible for almost all the energy produced and consumed by human beings. A bit more than two centuries later, world population has reached seven billions. The proportion living in cities is about a half. Inanimate sources converted by machines now account for the bulk of energy production and consumption. For most of this period, the human population has been growing at an average annual rate of 1.5%; cities at 2% a year; and energy production at around 3% a year. This last figure is double the rate of population increase, a powerful index of the economic expansion of the last 200 years. As a result, many people live longer, work less and spend more than they did before. But the distribution of all this extra energy has been grossly unequal. A third of humanity still works in the fields with their hands. Americans each consume 400 times more energy than the average Ugandan.

This hectic dash of humanity from the village to the city is widely assumed to be driven by an engine of economic growth and inequality known as “capitalism”. But several social forms have emerged to organize the process on a large scale, not all of them reducible to this single term: empires, nation-states, cities, corporations, regional federations, international organizations, capitalist markets, machine industry, financial services, transport and telecommunications networks. There is a pressing need for more effective social coordination at the global level and the drive towards local self-organization is strong everywhere. Special-interest associations of every kind proliferate. Resistance to inequality often takes the form of denigrating the dominant bureaucratic institutions — “the state” and “capitalism” being favourites in this regard – in favour of promoting small-scale self-organized groups and networks. Yet no future society of this century could dispense altogether with the principal social forms that have brought us to this point. So the real task is to work out how states, cities, big money and the rest might be selectively combined with citizens’ initiatives to promote a more democratic world society. A first step would be to cease viewing the economy in predominantly national terms.

This idea is not new. It is just that many activists in the SSE (social and solidarity economy) field, not to mention more radical groups, will not consider working with bureaucracies that they think of as the enemy. Yet the French revolution only succeeded because it was backed by the shippers of Nantes and Bordeaux, the Italian revolution by the industrialists of Milan and Turin. Kenya’s world-leading experiment in mobile money, M-pesa, was launched by a subsidiary of

Vodacom. Hewlett-Packard has developed research stations in outlying areas for some years now as part of an attempt to make computers accessible to the world's "poorest four billion".

The notion of a "popular economy" has emerged in Latin America since the 1990s, bringing new coalitions (peasants, urban informal workers, unions) into an alliance with progressive governments. Brazil under Lula introduced a community banking system combining microfinance and complementary currencies with strong local democratic input. The government of Uruguay has sponsored a "3C" alternative circuit of exchange and credit for SMEs in which national utilities and local tax offices anchor the circulation of unpaid invoices as currency. South Africa is speeding up SMEs' access to liquidity through an Invoice Clearing Bureau which brings together in a fast and efficient service banks, corporations and potentially 200,000 small businesses, many of them Black. It doesn't make sense to go it alone on a small scale, but equally one has to be selective in picking capitalist firms and state regimes to work with.

This dialectic of small-scale humanism and large-scale impersonal institutions may be illustrated by a composite portrait, where the balance is tipped towards the personal pole. Lindiwe -- a middle-aged Zulu woman who once worked in a factory and is now a domestic servant in Durban -- rents township accommodation from the municipality and travels to and from work in informal minibuses ("taxis"). She looks after her mother, who is crippled and receives a state pension, and her brother's young daughters since he has AIDS. Her teenage sons are unemployed and drifting into crime and drugs. Her husband disappeared over ten years ago. She sells cosmetics to neighbours in her spare time, shops once a week in a supermarket and at local stores the rest of the time. She attends a prosperity church, has joined a savings club (*stokvel*) there and owes money to loan sharks, but doesn't have a bank account. She lives in a society that might be characterized as "South African capitalism", but has only a peripheral connection to it.

Note the complexity of Lindiwe's economic arrangements and the variety of sources she draws on, few of them directly part of corporate capitalism. She understands her own life better than anyone else. But there are questions she doesn't know the answers to: Why are there no longer mining jobs for the men? Why did all the factories close? Why are the schools failing? Why has a Black government done so little to reduce poverty and inequality? So a human economy approach must somehow bridge the gap between Lindiwe's life and a world driven by forces she cannot know. This implies a huge effort of public education, but our programme's first task is to carry out research that might illuminate such an effort. We should note also that religion has always done a better job than social science of linking subjective lives meaningfully to the world conceived of as a social object and spiritual community; and religion already does that for Lindiwe now.

Given our preference to anchor economic strategies in people's everyday lives, their aspirations and their local circumstances, the intellectual movement that defines our research is conceived of as *extension* from the local towards the global. We can't arrive instantly at a view of the whole, but we can engage more concretely with the world that lies beyond the familiar institutions that immediately secure people's rights and interests. According to Mauss (1925) and Polanyi (1944) especially -- but all the founders of modern social theory too -- the chief way of achieving social extension has always been through markets and money in a variety of forms (Hann and Hart 2009, 2011).

Lindiwe could not juggle the plethora of institutions and activities she relies on without money. Money and markets are intrinsic to our human potential, not anti-human as they are often depicted (Hart 2000). Of course they should take forms that are more conducive to economic democracy. Her unanswered questions require answers grounded in the circumstances she knows well, but also capable of opening up to broader perspectives. It helps to recognize that money and markets span the extremes of human existence: they link us to the universe of our social relations and give precise definition to our most intimate circumstances. As Simmel (1900) said, money reflects our human potential to make universal society. It is also true, of course, that human motivations for economic action are more holistic than the economists allow for, taking in concerns with well-being and the good life, for example. These too have traditionally been shaped by organized religion. A human economy approach must revisit the complex interaction between religion, education and economy.

The principles of an "economy", conceived of as a specific strategy, must be discovered, articulated and disseminated. Such an economy, to be useful, should be based on general principles that guide what people do. It is not just an ideology or a call for realism. The social and technical conditions of our era -- urbanization, fast transport and universal media -- must underpin any inquiry into how the principles of human economy might be realised. A human economy approach does not assume that people know best, although they usually know their own interests better than those who presume to speak for them. The history of the word "economy" is both long and unfinished (Hann and Hart 2011: chapter 2). Any modern English dictionary reveals the residue of that history in the way we use terms like economy, economical and economize today, referring as they do to order, management and thrift in contexts ranging from household budgets to a world made by markets and money.

In origin "economy" privileged budgeting for domestic self-sufficiency; "political economy" promoted capitalist markets over military landlordism; "national economy" sought to equalize the chances of a citizen body. Perhaps "human economy" could be a way of envisaging the next stage,

linking unique human beings to humanity as a whole. It would then be a synthesis of the various elements in a sequence of social extension, “house-market-nation-world”, whose typical social units are not replaced, but rather co-exist.

The Pretoria Human Economy programme is first of all a new node in an international network animated by a common desire to advance economic democracy through academic research, social initiatives and public outreach. Based in Southern Africa, our aim is to articulate a new perspective in South-South and North-South dialogues about how to build a better world. This will be achieved through research and intellectual exchange more than by issuing programmatic statements. But we have to keep our eyes on the prize. So why not ask where the human economy is situated in a historical sequence of named economic strategies that still co-exist?

Finally, there is a contemporary political context that might add point to the human economy idea at this time. Oliver Williamson received a Nobel prize in economics last year for his development of Coase's theory of the firm. Coase (1937) asked why, if markets are efficient, any self-employed person would choose to work in a collective rather than outsource what they can't do best themselves. Williamson takes this division between what is internal and external to the firm to be entirely flexible, and by extension the social division of labour as a whole, including relations between corporations and governments who have maintained an uneasy alliance for a century and a half. The Fordist phase of internalizing transaction costs is over for a number of reasons, not least because the digital revolution has cheapened the cost of transferring information reliably. This does not mean that corporations have ceased to be large and powerful. Of the 100 largest economic entities on earth two-thirds are corporations and, of those, half are bigger than all but 8 countries. Moreover, we are witnessing a drive for corporate home rule which would leave them the only citizens in a world society made to suit their interests. This is the logical conclusion of the collapse of the difference between real and artificial persons in law in the late 19th century (Hart 2005), granting business corporations the legal standing of individual citizens. As Thomas Jefferson foresaw, when he predicted that commercial monopolies (he called them “pseudo-aristocrats”) constituted a powerful threat to democracy, mere human beings cannot compete with organizations of their size, wealth and longevity.

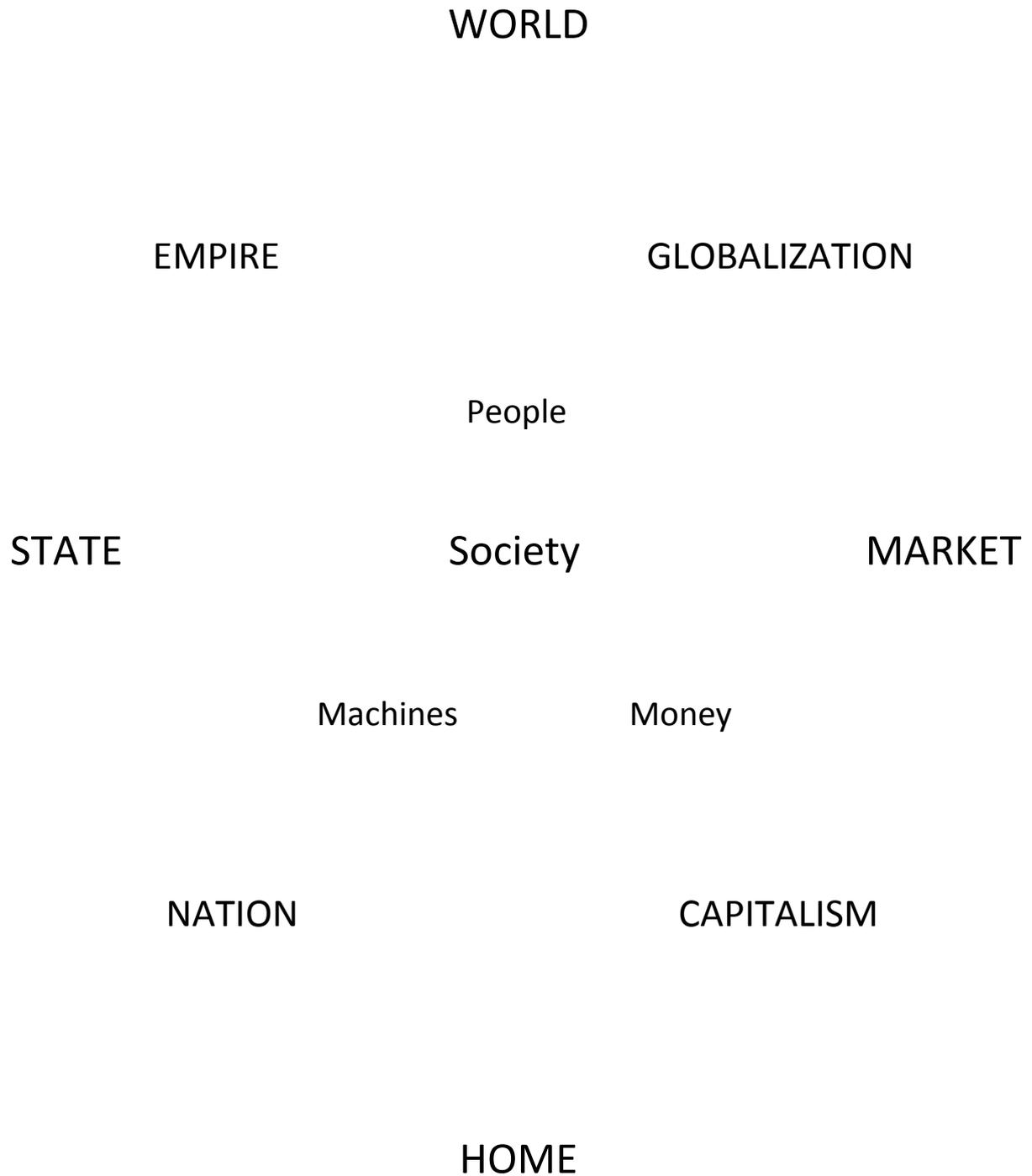
Coase and Williamson provide the intellectual flexibility to imagine a world where companies control the marketing of their brand, outsource production, logistics and much else and internalize government. For example, why rely on governments for conflict resolution? After all, corporations also have to handle conflict resolution internally. Why have state laws, when what the world needs most is moral law? The discourse of Corporate Social Responsibility (Salmon 2010) is a major field for negotiating changes in the relationship between firms and society. We all know about the

privatization of public services, which is another side of that coin. This is a matter of deadly significance and we have to ask what kinds of political mobilization are capable of challenging the power of corporations at every level from the local to the global.

The human economy idea may have its origins in small-scale informal activities and a humanist ideology, but effective resistance to a corporate takeover will require selective alliances between self-organized initiatives on the ground and large-scale bureaucracies of the public and private kind. It will also require the development of global social networks of the kind from which our Human Economy research programme drew its initial impetus. For, as Camus told us in *The Plague* (1947), the human predicament is impersonal; there are powerful anti-humanist forces in the world we share. So we have to build bridges between local actors and the new human universal, world society. To be human is to be a person who depends on and must make sense of impersonal social conditions in order to act effectively. Individual rational choice does not come close to approximating this situation. In the struggle with the corporations, we need to be very sure that we are human and they are not. The drive for economic democracy will not be won until that confusion has been cleared up.

Diagram 1 sums up the polarities that we hope to bridge somehow. Traditionally the 'world' is everything outside each of us is relevant to our lives (Heidegger 1927); its counterpart is the inside, whatever is familiar, 'home'. Managing the external and internal dimensions of society is particularly difficult when politics is mainly national and the money circuit has gone global (Hart 2013). Human beings need to feel "at home in the world". The twentieth century opposed state and market as two principles that came into ruinous conflict during the Cold War, whereas they are indispensable to each other, even if they leave out people much of the time (Hart 1986). "Society" bridges these extremes and, following Marx (1867), we consider that people, machines and money matter most in our societies, even if the order of their priority is usually the opposite of what is desirable.

Diagram 1 Human Economy



A strategy in the struggle for happiness

Next I examine some of the precedents for such an approach in the history of modern revolutions. I then compare the idea of a human economy in our programme with David Graeber's use of the same term (2011). Graeber (2013) engages in politics of revolutionary intent and I reflect on the tension between gradualism and revolution in our historical moment. I focus on two phases of the modern era – the Western liberal revolutions of the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries and the anti-colonial revolutions that displaced European empire in the twentieth. The American Revolution was both liberal and anti-colonial. A similar combination undermined the Soviet Empire two decades ago and now fuels insurgency against the American Empire in North Africa and the Middle East. After three decades of neoliberal globalization, we are entering a new phase of the struggle for a world fit for all people to live in. So the context for a human economy approach is this unfinished attempt to remove unequal society, a process that has often entailed war and revolution.

Immanuel Kant (2006) summarized “philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense of the word” as four questions:

What can I know?

What should I do?

What may I hope for?

What is a human being?

The first question is answered in *metaphysics*, the second in *morals*, the third in *religion* and the fourth in *anthropology*. But the first three “relate to anthropology”, he said, and might be subsumed under it. Anthropology for him was the practical arm of moral philosophy. It is indispensable to understanding any interaction involving human agents, being “pragmatic” in a number of senses: it is “everything that pertains to the practical”, popular (as opposed to academic) and moral in that it is concerned with what people should do, with their motives for action.

How then might human beings find a more secure foundation for self-knowledge as individuals and as a species? Kant held that the political project of building a just world society was necessary for human development in the long run. His anthropology, however, refers more to his vision of individual subjectivity and is a branch of humanist education. There are two prerequisites for being human: we must each learn to be self-reliant to a high degree and to belong to others, merging our identities in a bewildering variety of social relations. Much of modern ideology emphasizes how hard it is to be both self-interested and mutual. Yet some societies, by encouraging private and public interests to coincide, have managed to integrate them more effectively than ours. Twentieth-century civilization erected strong barriers between each of us as a subjective personality and

society as an impersonal object. Transcending this division must be intrinsic to the human economy project, one of whose premises is to aim for unity between self and society, to be at home in the world.

The object of a Kantian anthropology therefore is to discover whatever we need to know about humanity in order to build a more equal world fit for everyone (Hart 2010). This project could be embraced by students of history, sociology, geography, political economy, philosophy and literature, as well as by some anthropologists. The idea of 'development' has played a similar interdisciplinary role in the last half-century. The human economy programme is thus a particular extension and synthesis of anthropology and development studies.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Thomas Jefferson wrote these words in the tradition of liberal Enlightenment that was launched as a political programme by Locke, harnessed to the anthropology of human nature by Rousseau, transformed into economics by Smith and established as critique by Kant. They all envisaged a democratic revolution to replace the inequality of the Old Regime. A constitution guaranteeing equality to citizens should be based on knowledge of what all human beings have in common, their 'natural rights'. Government by and for the people is incompatible with entrenched social inequality in the form of political privilege. Human beings have a right to a full life, to free will unconstrained by arbitrary rules or by masters – that is, to metaphysical, anarchic and personal freedom – and to "happiness".

The Trinidadian writer and revolutionary, C.L.R. James -- author of *The Black Jacobins*, a history of Haiti's slave revolution (James 1938) -- drew heavily on this idea in *American Civilization* (1950). James took from America the idea of happiness as a revolutionary goal to be added to the European legacy of freedom and equality. Happiness appeared repeatedly in his writings, from asserting that Marx and Hegel "believed that man is destined for freedom and happiness", to emphasising the centrality of happiness to American society and culture, in contrast to Europeans' sense of the tragic. The notion of happiness lay too at the heart of his *Modern Politics* (James 1960), but there he called it "the good life".

Conventionally, "happiness" has been understood to be a trivial thing, a moment of pleasure that is necessarily fleeting. The notion now often means just material satisfaction. In the eighteenth century, however, the pursuit of happiness in this life was contrasted with religious passivity in the face of earthly suffering. James held happiness to be as essential as the desire for freedom and equality. It was the desire of the modern age, "what people want", expressive of complex and deeply rooted needs of human beings for integration, to become whole, to live in harmony with

others in society.

For James then, happiness had two facets, the freedom to be a fully developed, creative, individual personality and to be part of a community based on principles conducive to that end. This was the unity of private interest and public spirit that Alexis de Tocqueville (1840) found in the early American democracy and that James believed was still the palpable goal of the American people. James used “the struggle for happiness” as the title for his chapter on the workers. The integration of individuals in modern society requires a fundamental reorganization of how people experience work. The United States contributed the idea of happiness to our understanding of civilization itself. Today it has become a universal goal; and the peoples of the global South serve as the potent symbols of the collective force of humanity in our opposition to the forces of oppression. Happiness is inseparable from the active struggle for its attainment.

Both Tocqueville and James visited the New World after the political landscape had been transformed by a major event, the French and Russian revolutions respectively. Each thought that democracy is the moving force in modern history and that America played the leading role in that movement. Their faith was not based on laws and formal institutions, but on the common people, on their pragmatic political sense. They saw ordinary Americans’ customs and attitudes to life as the safeguard of democracy’s future. The structure of both *Democracy in America* and *American Civilization* reflects this premise. Each has two parts, the first dealing with the ideas and outward appearance of America’s public institutions, the second with the inner life and social practices of the American people themselves. Each book contains a movement from form to content that mirrors a historical contrast between European civilization and its American successor.

Tocqueville wanted to know how Enlightenment ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity had been incorporated into the new society. He found the principle of equality to be a more fundamental and durable feature of democracy than freedom; but he recognized their relationship to be close and complex: “Men cannot be equal without being free and equality, in its extreme form, must merge with freedom.” For Tocqueville the essential feature of American society was its people’s pursuit of worldly prosperity (happiness) under conditions of general equality. Accordingly, the central paradox facing American civilization was the unequal treatment of blacks, “the most formidable evil threatening the future of the United States.” Moreover, the pursuit of happiness channelled the restless energies of the population into commercial and industrial activity. Yet Tocqueville, like Jefferson before him, saw here the possible growth of an aristocracy based on money. The drive for greater efficiency in America was achieved, echoing Adam Smith (1776), through increasing specialization that resulted in a devastating dehumanization of the work process: “What is one to expect from a man who has spent twenty years of his life making the heads for

pins?" The greatest threat to a democratic society, however, was posed by 'despotism' which is part and parcel of the growth of democracy itself. Equality was linked to individualism; but, in isolating individuals, democracy weakened the connections between them and undermined their resistance to encroaching centralization. The power of society in a democracy was likely to be oppressive; the only counterweight in Tocqueville's view was the ability of citizens to form free associations.

James's own study, begun a century later, builds on de Tocqueville's. In *American Civilization* he takes up the themes of liberty, equality and the forms of association; and he examines their meaning in a mid-twentieth century America where the pursuit of material wealth had reached its full expression in the system of mass production pioneered by Henry Ford. For James in 1950 the society's original ideals of freedom and equality had by then been sacrificed to an oppressive work regime that paradoxically made it feasible for many people to aspire to the material means of achieving these goals. Whereas Tocqueville made equality central to the new democracy, James was preoccupied with freedom or rather with the awareness of its loss that permeated the consciousness of Americans in his day. Moreover, the worldwide struggle of popular forces against totalitarian bureaucracy had brought Tocqueville's prediction of rivalry between America and Russia to the nightmare conclusion of the Cold War.

For James there was a growing conflict between the concentration of power at the top of society and the aspirations of people everywhere for democracy to be extended into all areas of their lives. The struggle was for individual freedom within new and expanded conceptions of social life (*democracy*) or a fragmented and repressed subjectivity stifled by coercive bureaucracies (*totalitarianism*). The intellectuals were caught between the expansion of bureaucracy and the growing presence of people as a force in world society. Unable to recognize that people's lives mattered more than their own ideas, they oscillated between an introspective individualism (psychoanalysis) and service to the ruling powers, whether of the right (fascism) or left (Stalinism). As a result, the traditional role of the intellectual as an independent witness standing for truth had been compromised. Their absorption into bureaucracy as wage slaves and pensioners not only removed the intellectuals' independence, but separated their specialized activities from social life.

Thus, for both writers, the pursuit of happiness can only take root in a democratic society whose institutional forms and cultural content are conducive to self-expression and free association on the part of equal citizens. Subsequent experience of modern capitalism has shown that, while mass production of cheap commodities contributes to popular emancipation, reliance on formal politics alone leaves the engines of economic inequality untouched. The human economy approach foregrounds economic democracy as a goal, while retaining the struggle for freedom and happiness as its larger context.

At the core of such an approach is the pressing need to overcome the ruinous split between individual personality and impersonal society that became entrenched in the twentieth century. On the one hand, we wish to return the study of economy to ordinary people's concerns, to the level of human beings themselves; but being human also means learning to live together on this planet as one species among many, what I have called the new human universal. Another giant of the twentieth century's anti-colonial revolution has inspired my own attempts to conceptualize bridging these extremes of the human condition. Mohandas K. Gandhi preferred to start from the humanist end of the spectrum, arguing that "As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world -- that is the myth of the atomic age -- as in being able to remake ourselves."

Gandhi's critique of the modern state was devastating (Parekh 1989). Like Rousseau, he believed that it disabled its citizens, subjecting mind and body to the control of professional experts when the purpose of a civilization should be to enhance its members' sense of their own self-reliance. His vision of humanity was based on two universal postulates: every human being is a unique personality; and each takes part in an encompassing whole that humanity shares with other life forms (the individual and the species in Kant's terms). Modern social science has tended to efface both extremes in favour of investigating the proliferating associations and social divisions that mediate them – race, class, nationality, religion, locality etc. These are intrinsic to living in society, but we have to choose which social forms are best suited to spanning the gap between self and world for most people. As an Indian, Gandhi settled on the village and therefore on agricultural society as the most appropriate social vehicle for human development in that context.

The problem Gandhi confronted has been largely ignored by modern social theory. If the world is devoid of meaning, being governed by remote impersonal forces known only to specially trained experts, each of us is left feeling small, isolated and vulnerable. Yet modern cultures tell us that we are personalities with significance. How do we bridge the gap between a vast, unknowable world, which we experience as an external object, and a puny self, endowed with the subjective capacity to act alone or with others? The answer is to scale down the world, to scale up the self or a combination of both, so that a meaningful relationship might be established between the two (Hart 2003). This was once achieved by prayer, but today more often by works of fiction – novels, plays and movies. Gandhi chose the village as the site of India's renaissance because it was where most Indians lived, but more importantly because it had a social scale appropriate to self-respecting members of an agrarian civilization. Moreover, he devoted a large part of his philosophy to building up the personal resources of individuals (Gandhi 1927). Our task is to bring this project up to date and that too is one aim of the human economy project.

Human economy: between gradualism and revolution

In the last year or two, I have come to see that the economic and political arguments for a human economy have to be brought much closer together. We need to ask how our work must be modified to throw light on political movement at the global level. The extreme left and the centre left have different concepts of change. The first conceives of the future as the negation of “capitalism” and imagines a radical rupture with that system. The centre left, whether it relies on state intervention or voluntary associations of various kinds, emphasizes continuous developments that build on what people are doing already. In *The Human Economy* (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010), we resisted the use of labels like “the other economy” that lent themselves too readily to utopian ideologies. We followed what Marcel Mauss (1925) and Karl Polanyi (1944) understood by economic change, since we were looking for more than a simple negation.

What makes an economy “human”? First, it privileges people before abstractions. People make and remake their economic lives and that has to be the basis for thinking about economy. Any economics has to be accessible to them as a practical guide to how they manage those lives. But the economy is human in another sense too in that we increasingly confront economic problems and dilemmas as a species. Unlike the world seen through the blinkers of national politics and media, the future of humanity as a whole is at stake in today’s economic crises. So the idea of a human economy points in these two directions: towards what people really do and extending our perspectives to a global level, if possible.

Our French predecessor (Laville and Cattani 2002, 2006) came out at the height of the credit boom. Very few people envisaged major economic and political change at that time. When we published the English version in 2010, after the financial crisis had broken, it seemed that its message would find a more fertile reception in the new climate of public opinion. At least, the hegemony of mainstream economics had been dented by the crisis. Who could argue now – although many economists still do – that improved human well-being is guaranteed by leaving markets free of political intervention and social control. Markets were never free, but the dominant ideology provided cover for siphoning wealth to the top; and inequality is now very much on the political agenda. Even the *Financial Times* proposed a new synthesis of anthropology, history and economics to replace the old discipline. So we expected our ideas would meet a more favourable audience in this context.

Even so, we distanced ourselves from a “revolutionary” eschatology that suggested society had reached the end of something rotten and would soon be relaunched as something quite new. Against a singular notion of the economy as “capitalism”, we argued that all societies combine a plurality of economic forms and that several of these are universally distributed across history,

even if their combination is strongly coloured by the dominant type of organization in particular times and places. In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss (1925) pointed to other economic principles present in capitalist societies which would provide a sounder basis for building non-capitalist alternatives than the Bolshevik revolution's break with markets and money (Mauss 1997). Karl Polanyi too, insisted that throughout history the human economy (a term he used often) was made up of a number of mechanisms including the market as only one. We argued therefore that we can't afford to turn our backs on the institutions that have helped humanity make the transition to the world society that we now live in. Large-scale bureaucracies co-exist with varieties of popular self-organization and we have to make them work together rather than at cross-purposes, as they often do now. They are all responses to challenges posed by the modern world and should be combined in new and more inclusive ways. Although this looks like a gradualist approach to economic development, adopting it on a wide scale could have revolutionary consequences.

David Graeber is an anthropologist and an anarchist who was prominent from the beginning of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. His book, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Graeber 2011) is a best-seller and he has followed it up with an account of OWS, *The Democracy Project: a History, a Crisis, a Movement* (2013). His politics inform his economic analysis; and he has always taken an anti-statist and anti-capitalist position, with markets subsumed under the concept of capitalism. That is, he sees the future and the means of getting there as being based on the opposite of our capitalist states. He endorses "direct action" politics which he has practised and written about as ethnography (Graeber 2009a).

Following Nietzsche, he argues in the *Debt* book that money introduced a measure of unequal relations between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor. Whereas Rousseau traced inequality to the invention of property, Graeber locates the roots of human bondage, slavery, tribute and organized violence in debt relations. The contradictions of indebtedness, fed by money and markets, led the first world religions to articulate notions of freedom and redemption in response to escalating class conflict between creditors and debtors, often involving calls for debt cancellation. His positive story counters the one advanced by mainstream liberal economics.

In "A brief treatise on the moral grounds of economic relations" (Graeber 2011: Chapter 5), he develops a critique of the construction of "the economy" as a sphere separate from society in general. He identifies three principles of distribution: "everyday communism", hierarchy and reciprocity. By the first Graeber means a human capacity for sharing or "baseline sociality"; the second is sometimes confused with the third, since unequal relations are often represented as an exchange – you give me your crops in return for not being beaten up. The difference between hierarchy and reciprocity is that debt is conceived of as being permanent in the first case, but

temporary in the second. All three principles are present everywhere, but their relative emphasis is coloured by dominant economic forms. Thus “communism” is indispensable to modern work practices, but capitalism is a lousy way of harnessing our human capacity for cooperation.

The main point of interest for me is the contrast he draws between “human economies” and those dominated by money and markets (Graeber prefers to call them “commercial economies”). The great divide is thus between market and non-market economies, although elements of human economy persist in capitalist societies. He identifies the features of human economies and then shows what happens when they are forcefully incorporated into the economic orbit of larger “civilisations”. “Human economies” are, in a sense, the world we have lost, but might recover after the revolution. Graeber points out that these societies are not necessarily more humane, but “they are economic systems primarily concerned not with the accumulation of wealth, but with the creation, destruction, and rearranging of human beings” (2011: 130). They use money, but mainly as “social currencies” whose aim is to maintain relations between people rather than to purchase things. “In a human economy, each person is unique and of incomparable value, because each is a unique nexus of relations with others” (Ibid: 158). Yet their money forms make it possible to treat people as quantitatively identical in exchange and that requires a measure of violence. Brutality — not just conceptual, but physical too — is omnipresent, more in some cases than others.

Violence is inseparable from money and debt, even in the most “human” of economies, where ripping people out of their familiar context is commonplace. This gets taken to another level when they are subjected to systems like the Atlantic slave trade or western colonial empire. An extended reflection on slavery and freedom culminates in the ultimate contradiction of modern liberal economics, a worldview that conceives of individuals as being socially isolated in ways that could only be prepared for by a long history of enslaving conquered peoples.

David Graeber and I came up with the term “human economy” independently during the last decade (e.g. Graeber 2009b; Hart 2008). For him it marks a specific stage in human history, whereas I see the human economy everywhere, including in the cracks of modern societies. This goes with treating markets and money in a variety of forms as human universals. Graeber also believes that economic life everywhere is based on a plural combination of moral principles. Thus, helping each other as equals is essential to capitalist societies, but capitalism distorts and marginalizes this human propensity. Yet he also seems to expect a break with capitalist states fairly soon. At first sight, these positions (let’s call them “reform” and “revolution” for shorthand) are incompatible, but recent political developments point to the need to transcend such an opposition, even if their immediate consequences are uncertain.

I now want to place the human economy project within a historical context of revolution, so the gap between us may be narrowing. Perhaps we both envisage not one, but two approaches to the problem of democratic change. If so, there are still differences that need to be debated. Graeber's preference for lumping together states, money, markets, debt and capitalism, along with violence, war and slavery as their habitual bedfellows, is one bone of contention. Markets and money have redemptive qualities (Hart 2000) that could be put to progressive economic ends; nor will states, corporations and bureaucracy die away soon. If "everyday communism" lives in capitalist societies and the line separating human and commercial economies is blurred, clearly David Graeber's historical vision too allows for continuity in human economic practices. Yet revolutionary binaries surface at various points in his book and may even be said to underpin it.

A revolutionary moment in history

The events of 2011-2012 -- when the financial crisis went political and the economic crisis began to seem more permanent -- are comparable at least with the changes that took place in 1989-1990 and are perhaps more significant than the break-up of the Soviet bloc. The trigger was the ousting of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt during early 2011. Uprisings followed in Europe (protests in Greece, Los Indignados in Madrid), the student protests and riots too place in Britain and Chile, before Occupy wall Street captured the world's attention in New York. Whatever its consequences for American society and politics, this had profound significance for the global movement. It showed that the US was not fixed in stone and that revolts around the world had a counterpart there. After all we live in the American Empire and the "Arab Spring" should be seen as a revolt against that Empire. Oil has succeeded gold as the world economy's principal commodity and its control underlies the dollar's position as the world's reserve currency. The Middle East, Israel and oil are so central to American power -- not to mention the wars they have launched in the region against Iraq, Afghanistan and maybe Iran before long -- that the sacking of Mubarak had immense significance for the world. But at first there was no sign that anything was moving in the US. All you had was the Tea Party and a stalemate in Congress.

C.L.R. James came from Trinidad and died an old man in the late 1980s. He often said after 1968 that there were only two world revolutions left -- the second Russian Revolution and the second American Revolution. In *American Civilization* (James 1993), as we have seen, he argued that struggle against totalitarian bureaucracy to bring democracy into people's lives was at its strongest in the United States. He always believed that American society must be central to any future world revolution. I am not predicting that the OWS movement will lead directly to mass insurrection there. But its cultural example was immediately taken up within the country and across the world;

and this world is unified by the contradictions of American imperial power. I watched Tiananmen Square on TV with James in April 1989. He was 88 years old and died a few weeks later. If you recall, the students were protesting because of an international meeting there to which Gorbachev was invited. The whole world was gripped by the spectacle. He told me then that the Chinese Communist Party would put down this rebellion easily enough, but “The Russians will find it hard to hold onto Eastern Europe after this”. The Berlin Wall came down six months later and that was the start of the second Russian revolution.

All of this leads me to reconsider the perspective we adopted in *The Human Economy* (Hart et al 2010). It now seems that a piecemeal approach to economic change should confront the idea of world revolution. In January 1917, Lenin gave a speech to Swiss socialists in Zurich where he said he did not expect revolution in his lifetime, but he hoped that the younger comrades would be able to fight in one. The Russian revolution got going in March, when the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets took to the streets; in September, Lenin wrote a letter seeking to justify why he called for revolution in September, but had not in July (Lenin 1917); Russia had pulled out of the war in the meantime; and by October the revolution was a done deal. You should read Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932): it takes 1300 pages to cover nine months and some meetings where the author’s intervention was decisive get 40 pages. This is speed-up. The normal pace of talking, writing and publishing cannot accommodate this kind of reality. I am not suggesting that we should all give up academic scholarship to join the barricades. I want to train young people to study and work for economic progress. Nevertheless, even this more sedate approach has to distinguish between the time frame of revolutionary insurrection and that for building a more effective platform to help people experience greater economic democracy in their lives. These long-term projects are vital, but the premises of a revolutionary moment are radically compressed, for good or ill.

Gabriella Coleman is an anthropologist who has been a participant observer in the 4chan chat rooms of the hacker network, Anonymous since 2008. Anonymous is an occult organization of geeks, trolls and agitators who came to prominence in 2011 with attacks on government and corporate websites in defence of Wikileaks and other causes. It adopted an ethos of disguise as a cloak for being disruptive on the name of freedom of expression. But it has since become an engaged force for social justice. There are important parallels between Anonymous and OWS, but one is clandestine and the other transparent. The pursuit of openness as a political virtue also requires a degree of closure, however. We might want the banks to be more transparent, but which of us would like our own situation to be made public? So the open/closed dialectic may be less polarised than it is sometimes made out to be. The same may be said of freedom and necessity, perhaps also of revolution and reform. You can’t have one without both. In winding up her

argument, Coleman (2012) draws on Ernst Bloch, a favourite writer of mine too:

Anonymous acts in a way that is irreverent, often destructive, occasionally vindictive, and generally disdainful of the law, but it also offers an object lesson in what Frankfurt School philosopher Ernst Bloch (1995) calls ‘the principle of hope.’ In his three-volume work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1938-47), Bloch attends to a stunningly diverse number of signs, symbols, and artefacts from different historical eras, ranging from dreams to fairy tales, in order to remind us that the desire for a better world is always in our midst. Bloch works as a philosophical archaeologist, excavating forgotten messages in songs, poems, and rituals. They do not represent hope in the religious sense, or even utopia—there is no vision of transcending our institutions, much less history—but they do hold latent possibilities that in certain conditions can be activated and perhaps lead to new political realities. ‘The door that is at least half-open, when it appears to open onto pleasant objects, is marked hope,’ Bloch writes. The emergence of Anonymous from one of the seediest places on the Internet seems to me an enactment of Bloch’s principle of hope.

So Bloch suggests that this aspiration for a better world is everywhere and inside us, an infrastructure always ready to be tapped into and given more concrete impression. I make a similar case for the human economy – people have always had many different ways of organizing their economic lives and these make up a reservoir of knowledge and aspiration that, given appropriate direction, could lead us to a better economy.

The basic principles of the Occupy movement are easily understood (Schneider 2012):

The Declaration of the Occupation is addressed not to governments—no hope there—but rather “to the people of the world,” urging communities everywhere to “assert your power.” “We are creating an exemplar society,” states Occupy Boston’s Declaration of Occupation... “No one’s human needs go unmet,” [it] continues. Planet Occupy, like last fall’s occupations, provides food and shelter for everyone, no questions asked. It also ensures health care, mutual education, childcare, legal representation, and a large, meticulously catalogued library. Sounds like a good social democracy—except that, in the words of Occupy Wall Street’s Principles of Solidarity, the basic unit of political life is not the ballot box but ‘autonomous political beings engaging in direct and transparent participatory democracy.’ Though they might be wired to the teeth, the political beings of Planet Occupy carry out their democracy face to face, in well-coordinated small groups that operate by consensus.

Even with its inhabitants’ passion for local autonomy, though, Planet Occupy is a globalized place. People and their ideas travel freely, creating new opportunities

and partnerships wherever they go. Assemblies share their plans and innovations over Interoccupy. Following the urge in the Principles for ‘the broad application of open source,’ all ideas are common property, and these collective resources are, according to the Statement of Autonomy, valued more highly than money—if money still exists at all. ‘We have come to Wall Street as refugees from this native dreamland, seeking asylum in the actual,’ explains Communiqué 1, an article in the movement journal Tidal. ‘We seek to rediscover and reclaim the world.’

The movement’s documents contain fewer hints about economy. The Principles of Solidarity calls for ‘redefining how labour is valued,’ which may look something like the worker-owned cooperatives currently being developed at the Freedom Plaza occupation in Washington, D.C. Broadly speaking, human needs prevail over claims on profit. Companies are chartered for the public good, not private gain. Participatory democracy prevails in workplaces, neighbourhoods, and other productive groupings. Many aspects of the economy—food, especially—remain local. This is necessary partly in order to preserve and sustain the natural environment. Everyone on Planet Occupy knows, after all, that if they don’t protect the planet, there will be nothing left to occupy. There must be no divisions, no exclusions. Goods must be shared on the basis of to each according to their needs.

This is a common revolutionary eschatology based on the negation of how capitalist states appear to be run. Production is of public goods, *not* for profit. It contrasts quite starkly with a human economy approach. I believe that limited markets can be fair distributors of goods and that states are good for redistribution and guarantees of social rights, as long as they make room for people to help themselves by drawing on the mutuality that comes from living together, not just contracts and citizenship. I have been impressed by recent developments in Brazil. Alternative economic organization in Europe tends to be conceived of as bottom up initiatives that are independent of government and large corporations or against them. The Brazilian government, however, has played a major role in promoting and coordinating the solidarity economy. We might call this social democracy revisited and it is not to be despised. I don’t subscribe to the capitalist model of markets or to governments reproducing inequality through coercion; but I do expect the movement from below to be supported and sometimes coordinated by the powers that be. I have not yet come across a civil society movement capable of launching a communications satellite. So there must be room for accommodation between large-scale and small-scale economic organization in any imaginable future. The political terms of their cooperation remain to be settled of course; and there lies the scope for revolution.

The Occupy movement and the work of their most visible spokesmen, such as David Graeber (2013), thus contain two competing visions of economic change, each with its counterpart in a human economy approach. One is “the world turned upside down”, a complete break with the past which might be envisaged as a return to a simpler and more wholesome way of life before the state and capitalism. The other relies on people to be who they are, to find ways to come together and develop their mutual interests without violence or coercion. These two visions are struggling with each other in our revolutionary moment. We have to think seriously about revolutionary situations and there are plenty of historical examples to go. Revolution is a very different world from one where we plan and build programmes that people can live by in the long run.

Consider a speech by James (1981) to students about the Guyanese academic-turned-revolutionary, Walter Rodney (1972), who was blown up by an agent provocateur he trusted. He tells them that they don’t understand what revolution is and neither did Rodney who lost his life as a result. No competent revolutionary organization should have left its leader unprotected. (James himself was a Trotskyist dodging the bullets of Stalinist assassins while researching *The Black Jacobins* in Paris during the 1930s). James quotes from Lenin’s letter of September 1917 where he talks about “insurrection”. Not every mass disturbance is a revolution. The events in Tunisia and Egypt were insurrections, not revolutions. Lenin, in James’ words, identifies three components of revolution and political parties have nothing to do with any of them.

Firstly, there must be a clash, a revolutionary upsurge of the people. Then, secondly, there must be a turning point, when the activity of the advanced ranks is at its height; and thirdly, the enemy must be vacillating.

Lenin is often misrepresented as an advocate of the vanguard party. He himself abandoned all those ideas as soon as he arrived at the Finland station and found the soviets in the streets. Until then, he said, I was just another bourgeois politician. Revolutions change people. Lenin also said that insurrection is an *art*, not a science. At the end of his speech, James recalls a conversation with Trotsky in Mexico in 1938:

“But how come, time and again, the revolutionary party – this is the party, not the mass movement — was wrong in its analysis of the situation and Lenin turns out to be right and set it the correct way? How did that happen?” And I expected him to tell me how Lenin knew philosophy, how he knew political analysis, how he knew psychology, or how he knew the revolution. He did not. He said, “Lenin always had his eyes upon the mass of the population, and when he saw the way they were going, he knew that tomorrow this was what was going to happen.”

The prophet as anthropologist! And Gabriella Coleman is in the hackers' conversation rooms trying to figure out what they are doing.

Conclusions for the human economy project

So what are the implications of all this for a human economy approach? Writing for educational purposes in the long run is a very different enterprise from trying to understand the moment we are living through. The best statement I know on this is by Marx in the introduction to *Grundrisse* (1859) the notes he compiled during 14 years of reading in the British Museum library. We must start, he says, from our concrete moment in world history, whatever that is. We start with the conditions we encounter and study them. Then we build analytical concepts and propositions using the results of what we have studied. Analysis is making sense of what we find out there. Some people think that the task finishes there, with the ideas. Once you have the analysis, you can rest happy, publish your book and get tenure. But the point is to insert the analytical tools we have developed back into the moment we are living in; and you can do that in many ways, through academic writing, journalism, political parties, scientific experiments, social networking, blogs, demonstrations, conferences, whatever. The test of their validity lies in this dialectical or, Kant would say, pragmatic process. Only then might we reach a full account of our moment in history. He plans to do this in *Capital* (Marx 1867), but actually he never got there. He lists five prospective volumes culminating in a history of the world economy as a whole; but he hardly made it to three of them.

If we are honest and realistic, we all have to locate ourselves at some point along the path Marx charted there. The core of the human economy project lies in dealing with the two approaches I have highlighted. I like to juxtapose my own work with David Graeber's, noting the similarities and differences that change subtly over time. For David the term "human economy" refers to an earlier period of human history that survives in ethnographic accounts of primitive, exotic peoples. It's an old story, but a powerful one, and he tells it well. The objective of a human economy is the social reproduction of people. In Africa, for example, it takes the form of cows being exchanged for women in marriage as a source of legitimation for children. This version is diametrically opposed to capitalism, the market and the state.

I prefer to identify a human economy as existing everywhere in dialectical tension with the dominant economic institutions of our day. It is not incompatible with money and markets. These can be made to serve human interests and needs, as they always have, and they don't have to take the exploitive form that they currently do. I like ordering books and apps online and don't want to haggle over my daily bread or stand in line for a hand-out. Markets and money rest on what Durkheim (1893) called "the non-contractual element in the contract", a body of customs, laws and

history that are obscured, marginalized and repressed by bourgeois ideology, even as they contain the living potential to humanize our economic institutions.

It is the same with revolution – a digital version envisages a switch to the negation of what we know and an analogue version expects to mobilize people by building on what they know and do already. We need to combine these approaches rather than oppose them. David and I already do that, each in our own way. The tension between them spans all the current protest movements from Tahrir Square to OWS and Anonymous. We cannot afford to go back to the polarized and sectarian politics of the twentieth century, when “revolution” and “reform” defined opposite sides in a destructive and partisan conflict. If I aim for anything in articulating the human economy idea, it is to transcend the extremes of state socialism and free enterprise that so misleadingly defined the sides in the Cold War. What is the Pentagon after all if not the largest socialist collective in world history?

Let us return briefly to Diagram 1. The human economy mediates two paired antinomies – state and market, home and world – which framed the twentieth century’s dominant social form, “national capitalism”, the attempt to manage money, markets and accumulation through central bureaucracy in the name of a cultural community of national citizens. The economic crisis of our day is the collapse of this system (Hart 2013). Rather than oppose the poles of either pair to each other, we must try to synthesize them through a pragmatic focus on what people really do.

Three things count in our societies — people, machines and money. But money buys the machines that control the people. Our political task – and I believe it was Marx’s too – is to reverse that order, not to help people escape from machines and money, but to encourage them to develop themselves through machines and money. To the idea of economic crisis and its antidotes, we must now add the possibility of political revolution. Revolutions give rise to digital contrasts, but human societies are built on analogue processes. This is not just an academic debating point. A lot hinges on how humanity responds to the contradictions of the turbulence ahead.

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